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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effect of bibliotherapy on the self-concept of seven neurologically impaired primary students in a self-contained classroom. The students were pretested and posttested with the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and the Self-Concept Picture Inventory. Two filmstrips from the "Who Am I?" series were shown daily to the children during a one-week span and were followed by the reading of bibliotherapeutic books and group discussions. The books were chosen on the basis of weaknesses exhibited from the pretests and were read three times a week for eleven weeks. The posttests indicated no significant statistical gain in self-concept, though there was a positive change in mean individual scores. (Author/RL)

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THE EFFECT OF BIBLIOTHERAPY ON THE SELF-CONCEPT

by

Darlene A. Walters

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I MEAN, SD's, t-TEST RESULTS OF THE PIERS-HARRIS CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT SCALE AND THE SELF-CONCEPT PICTURE INVENTORY 6

Bibliotherapy can be thought of as "storybook guidance." It is a means for a child to identify with a character in a story who has similar problems to help the child understand himself (Schultheis 1972).

The neurologically impaired child's problems are usually compounded by physical, social, emotional and academic difficulties. The constant failure and lack of acceptance of one's own deficiencies result in a negative self-concept.

It is widely accepted that a student must believe in himself in order to perform confidently and successfully in school.

Since the neurologically impaired child perceives himself in such a negative manner, it seems necessary to find a solution to reduce the problem. A solution would prove useful in instructional programs for such children and could be incorporated in instructional programs by others.

Research has continued to determine whether a positive self-concept can be developed through the use of bibliotherapy. An experiment in the use of literature for guidance purposes in the classroom was reported by Elkins (1949). Information on the children was obtained fr[illegible] sociometric tests, individual interviews, compositions by the children on wishes and worries, diaries kept for two days, and sociodrama. Two main areas of problems emerged:

those related to family and those related to peer relationships. Books were chosen in both areas, and the reading was followed by class and panel discussions. The teacher was able to judge from written work and discussion, differences in reactions. She found greater understanding in approaching a problem, deeper understanding of others' feelings, greater readiness to accept differences in others, and the ability to bring greater resources to the consideration of a problem.

Webster (1961) was able to reduce fear of the dark and of dogs in first grade children by reading stories showing the positive attributes of the thing or situation they feared, and by the undirected discussion which followed. Each of two groups, 35 afraid of the dark, and five afraid of dogs, read one story for each of five weeks. Interviews, repeated three months after completion of the final story, indicated that fear was reduced in 29 of those who feared the dark, and in all five who feared dogs. Webster attributed the change to the possibility of relearning and the reinforcement of pleasant experiences in group discussion. Whether or not the change in attitude in these experiments was accompanied by a change in behavior is not known.

Lewis (1971) conducted an investigation to determine if there is a difference in the manner in which disabled and non-disabled persons view such variables as body-image

and self-concept. The body-image satisfaction and importance scales were then administered to 319 eleventh and twelfth grade students. There were two "normal," one "socially disadvantaged" and two "visually handicapped" samples. It was hypothesized that there would be significantly higher body-image and self-concept satisfaction in non-disabled groups than in disabled groups and that body-image importance and self-concept importance would be significantly higher in disabled groups than in non-disabled groups. It was further hypothesized that there is a greater independence between the variables of body-image satisfaction and importance and self-concept satisfaction and importance in non-disabled groups than there is in any of the disabled groups. None of the hypotheses of this study were confirmed.

Hypothesis

A study was therefore conducted to determine if bibliotherapy would improve the self-concept of the neurologically impaired child. It was hypothesized that no significant improvement of the neurologically impaired child's self-concept would exist through the use of bibliotherapy.

Instructional Procedures and Sample

The entire class of seven primary neurologically impaired children in a self-contained classroom were pretested with the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale

and The Self-Concept Picture Inventory. The study involved the investigator reading books classified as bibliotherapeutic to the students followed by group discussion. Books were read three times a week for eleven weeks. On the twelfth week a post-test, using the identical scale and inventory, was administered to determine if the children's self-concept showed any improvement.

Definitions, Assumptions, Limitations

It is important to define the following terms so that misinterpretation does not result:

Bibliotherapy - assignment of books to be read on various subjects to help a child or a parent understand a problem or to help him see the problem in a different way. The use of reading as a therapeutic aid.

Self-Concept - the individual's perception of himself as a person, which includes his abilities, appearance, performance in his job, and other phases of daily living.

Neurologically Handicapped - a child who evidences minimal impairment or neuro-motor functioning.

Self-Contained Classroom - a classroom in the form of school organization in which classes are composed of groups of children which remain in one location, with one teacher (or team of teachers) for all or nearly all instructional activities, to be distinguished from a departmentalized classroom.

The study involved only seven neurologically handicapped children who were in a self-contained classroom. Due to their various impairments, they lacked the ability to comprehend some of the questions on the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. Therefore, an alternate inventory, The Self-Concept Picture Inventory, was utilized to determine each student's self-concept. The time factor of eleven weeks may also prove a limiting factor in that results, if any, might be affected by the relatively short interval used to bring about change.

Specific Procedures

The entire class of seven primary neurologically impaired children in a self-contained classroom were pretested with the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and The Self-Concept Picture Inventory.

Before the investigator began reading books classified as bibliotherapeutic, the film series Who Am I was used as an introduction for the children to understand and take a closer look at themselves and their inner feelings. Two filmstrips were shown daily during a one week span, followed by a group discussion.

After the filmstrip, bibliotherapeutic books were read to the students followed by a group discussion. (See Appendix A). Books were read three times a week for eleven weeks. On the twelfth week a post-test using the identical

scale and inventory was administered to determine if the children's self-concept showed any improvement.

Results

Table I illustrates the findings from the pre and post tests that were administered.

Table I

Mean, SD's t-test Results of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and The Self-Concept Picture Inventory

	Mean	SD	t
Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale			
Pretest	58	6.81	1.45
Post-test	63.1	5.06	
Self-Concept Picture Inventory			
Pretest	20	5.79	.442
Post-test	20.85	3.35	

There was a 5.1 point difference between the pre and post mean on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and a .85 point difference between the mean on the Self-Concept Picture Inventory, indicating that a difference though non-significant, in the results had been produced by

bibliotherapy. All scores changed in a positive direction except for one score on each test, that one score on each test being attained by the different students.

The lack of growth may have been hindered by numerous reasons.

The resultant t of 1.45 and .442 indicates that there was no significant change made on either test.

Conclusions and Implications

While the use of bibliotherapy has been a subject of controversy, it can be stated that, as a result of this study, evidence exists to suggest that a definite improvement can be achieved in using bibliotherapy. The means in the pre and post-tests of this experiment indicated a modest, but not statistically, significant change. While the hypothesis of this study is supported, the results could have been produced by chance, therefore, must be viewed cautiously.

One implication of the positive growth noted in this study is that bibliotherapy over a longer period of time may considerably affect the child's self-concept with statistical significant change resulting.

There is a need for further research to determine the effect of bibliotherapy on the self-concept. However, as previously noted, the key to success may only be determined by an extension of time. A period of three months is perhaps too little time to produce significant results.

THE EFFECT OF BIBLIOTHERPAY ON THE SELF-CONCEPT OF THE NEUROLOGICALLY IMPAIRED CHILD

RELATED RESEARCH

Another element in this study that might have restricted the outcome is the type of classified student utilized and their age levels. Since the therapeutic readings were in a school setting and not in a clinical one-to-one environment, the group discussions that followed each story may have inhibited a more open discussion. A study to compare self-concept changes on a one-to-one basis versus open group discussion should be developed to determine the efficacy of each.

According to various articles written on self-concept, it is widely accepted that a student must believe in himself in order to perform confidently and successfully in school. There is a need to improve the self-concept and bibliotherapy may be the means to reach this goal.

Bibliotherapy has been used for therapeutic purposes since the early period of manuscripts and scrolls as stated by Moore (1944). The method itself, according to Emeruwa (1958), "is as old as the prophets who exhorted their audiences to read the law to gain direction for daily living." The goal was the same: literature being used as an "open sesame" to personal organization.

Nickerson (1975) suggested that in order for bibliotherapy to serve as a therapeutic medium, it usually involves several dynamic and interrelated aspects - namely: involvement which is an interest, or a sense of being "caught up in" and concerned with the tale, or message being delivered; identification is a real or imagined affiliation of the reader or someone he knows with a character or group in the story; catharsis is the release of emotional energy through experiencing vicariously the character's emotions; insight is the awareness and clarification of the reader's own motivations, needs, and feelings.

According to Shrodes (1955) and Corman (1975), the integration of intellectual perception and emotional drives, described above depends upon many human, variable factors.

Witty (1968), Lorang (1968), Newell (1957, Lindahl and Koch (1952), and many others are in agreement that through the interaction between the reader and selected materials, a child can obtain greater insight into himself and others. They also concluded that bibliotherapy is a technique available to classroom teachers.

Since this technique is available to classroom teachers, Salup and Szako (1978) feel that there are few bibliotherapy courses taught in colleges in the United States. Teachers at all grade levels deal with the needs and problems of their students. Therefore, teachers having a background in bibliotherapy could be instrumental in assisting their students to deal with problems that may arise.

There have been numerous studies relating to bibliotherapy as well as those on self-concept. In a study conducted by Moore (1944), he described a special type of bibliotherpay developed by the Delaware State Society of Mental Hygiene: an attempt was made to teach seventh and eighth grade pupils wholesome reactions to emotional crises in order to prevent mental breakdowns in later life. Filmstrips were used to stimulate discussion; then stories were told, dramatized by students, and discussed. Some of the topics were: the importance of friends, facing up to personal problems, overcoming handicaps, and the relationships with siblings, parents and relatives. It is not known whether or not this experience was actually beneficial.

A successful study by Elkins (1949), previously revealed the effectiveness of using literature for guidance purposes.

Herminghaus (1954) found that the results of using bibliotherapy on a group of eighth graders promoted desirable attitudes and produced a higher degree of personal and social adjustment. Shrodes (1955) reports similar findings. She states that for some, the use of a therapeutic approach to reading may result in an immediate increase in self-awareness and acceptance and a greater capacity to maintain fulfilling relationships.

Martin (1955) reported an experiment conducted by Pirie with a group of first graders. After reading a number of selections to the children, she used a tape recorder to determine the impact the books had upon the children. The children identified with characters that helped them solve their problems; they also seemed to identify acceptable social behavior. A similar study was conducted by Livengood (1961). She used a group of sixth graders, finding the same results.

Webster's (1961) study with first graders indicated the effectiveness of reading stories to the children resulted in the reduction of their initial fears.

Witty (1964) feels that bibliotherapy used as a preventive measure or guidance in reading according to individual needs is gaining acceptance when applied to satisfying the needs of slow learners and gifted students.

Lindeman and Kling (1968-1969) also feel that bibliotherapy can help meet the developmental needs not only of young people in the classroom, but also of some maladjusted individuals.

An additional study by Cutforth (1980) examined the effect of group bibliotherapy on the anxieties of children in grades one, two, and three. Another aspect of the study was to determine if bibliotherapy was more effective at a specific grade, sex, or age level within a grade. Three schools were utilized with all first, second, and third grade children at each school participating. The total sample contained 295 students from intact classrooms. The schools were designated as Control Group I, Control Group II, and the Experimental Group. Treatments were randomly assigned to the groups. Control Group I received no experimental treatment (no reading of books by the investigator). Control Group II received non-bibliotherapeutic treatment. The treatment involved the investigator reading books not classified as bibliotherapeutic to the students twice a week for five consecutive weeks. The Experimental Group received bibliotherapeutic treatment. The treatment involved the investigator reading books classified as bibliotherapeutic to the students twice a week for five consecutive weeks. All children participating in the study were administered a pretest. The instrument used was Sarason's General Anxiety Scale for Children.

In comparing the post-test scores, significant differences between the groups were found when analyzed by treatment and sex. There were no significant differences when analyzed by grade or age within a grade. Treatments were found to differ significantly at grades one, two, and three for males but not for females. In all instances, except for grade three females, the Experimental Group, having bibliotherapeutic treatment, had lower anxiety scores than the other two treatment groups. The data obtained in the study support the statement that reading bibliotherapeutic books to boys in grades one, two, and three does lessen their anxieties.

Calhoun and Morse (1977) reported in their study that it was necessary to identify the term "self" since the field is plagued by a multiplicity of terms which are not clearly differentiated. To reduce the confusion, they came up with three discrete concepts: self, as the sum total of all one can call his; self-concept, the substantive description which one employs to identify his nature; and self-esteem, one's satisfaction with his self-concept.

There are researchers who believe that self-perception cannot be assessed. Piers and Harris (1964), state that: "Validation of self-report scales is always difficult, since the appropriateness of behavior and other criteria outside the self can be questioned." There are several self-concept inventories, such as the Piers-Harris

Children's Self-Concept Scale. Another inventory is The Self-Concept Picture Inventory created by Wiseman and Adams (1972) to evaluate Title I schools, grades one, two, and three in Atton, Illinois. The SCPI measured the impact of counseling programs upon self-image and attitudes toward school and peer groups; and the influence of community services upon students responses to the general educational program.

Brookover and six colleagues (1966) attempted to relate evaluation of others (parents, experts, and counselors) to self-perception of ability and school achievement. They found that a positive communication from parents relative to a child's ability led to a significant increment in both self-perception of ability and gradepoint average.

Gillham (1967) reported that a group of twenty eighth grade students who were poor readers with inadequate self-concepts, were told that the kindergarten teacher in a neighborhood school had exceedingly large classes and no assistant. After careful preparation the students read to a small group of youngsters once a week for an entire semester. Teachers reported a noticeable difference in their self-concepts.

A study by Caplin (1969) focused on the academic achievement and its relation to self-concept. It was hypothesized that children, both white and Negro, attending a de facto segregated school have less positive self-concepts

than do children attending desegregated schools, and that there is a significant positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. Sixty children from the intermediate grades of each elementary schools in a small city in northern New Jersey were matched on the basis of age, grade, sex, race, intelligence and socioeconomic status. Analyses of variance were computed on the scores obtained from the self-report instrument administered and correlations between these scores and achievement scores were calculated. It was found that children attending the de facto segregated school had less positive self-concepts. There was also a significant positive relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. That is, those children having more positive self-concepts had higher academic achievement.

Berretta (1970) found that teachers have probably always known that emotional factors play an important part in a child's success in learning to read. Of all the areas of personality correlated with reading achievement, one factor, self-concept, seems to be particularly useful for reading teachers.

There are carefully designed studies that clearly show the relationship between self-concept and reading. One study that indicates a cause-effect relationship between self-concept and reading achievement is the doctoral dissertation of Lamy (1963). In this study, measurements of self-perception were made during kindergarten prior to

reading instruction and during the first grade. Self-perception scores correlated as highly with reading achievement as did intelligence scores. Together the two scores were found to be better predictors of reading success than either score taken separately. Because Lamy's study shows a positive relationship between reading achievement and self-perceptions that were inferred during kindergarten, before reading instruction, it gives strong support to the idea that self-perceptions are causal factors in reading success and failure.

In a study by Williams and Cole (1968), they attempted to relate self-concept to several dimensions of the child's experience that are deemed fundamental to effective academic adjustment. It was hypothesized that a child's conception of school would be related to his conception of himself, and therefore might be construed as an extension of his self-concept. Eighty 6th grade students were used as subjects for all phases of the investigation. Significantly positive correlations were obtained between self-concept measures and the following variables: conception of school, social status at school, emotional adjustment, mental ability, reading achievement, and mathematical achievement.

Cummings (1970) compared self-concepts of groups of children selected in terms of their reading achievement in relation to that of others in their classroom with the self-concepts of other groups of children selected in terms of

their reading achievement in relation to their anticipated reading level. More specifically, the problem was to find if there were statistically significant similarities and differences in the way the selected groups of children reported their self-concept with reference to self, mother, teacher, and peers in terms of 14 value factors. Happiness, Size, Sociability, Ability, Sharing, Male Acceptance, Fear of Things, Fear of People, Strength, Cleanliness, Health, Sttractiveness, Desire of Material Things and Independence. The population from which the group was selected consisted of 189 third grade children attending two of the larger elementary schools in the Tuscaloosa City School System, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Recent data from the California Reading Tests were obtained from the school files and were used in selecting groups according to established criteria. Forty-eight children, 24 boys and 24 girls, were selected for the study. The Thomas Self-Concept Values Test was used to measure this self-concepts of the subjects. Scores were obtained on the four referents and the fourteen value factors. The findings seemed to support the existence of definite relationships between self-concept and reading achievement. These findings seemed to have relevant implications for two groups of educators: students in teacher education and classroom teachers.

Lewis' study (1971) investigated whether there are differences in the manner in which disabled and non-disabled persons view such variables as body-image and self-concept.

None of the hypotheses were confirmed.

Hauserman (1974) described an experiment in which elementary school children with negative self-concepts as measured by the Bolea Pictorial Self-Concept Scale and teacher ratings were exposed to a behavioral procedure designed to raise their self-concepts. Subjects were 30 children, grades K-4, who were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The treatment procedure consisted of an elicitation by a teacher of a positive self-statement from an experimental subject. Each statement was immediately followed by a positive social reinforcer. At the end of the 40 day treatment period every child receiving the treatment showed a large gain in self-concept scores. These gains were maintained on a delayed post-test given one month after cessation of the elicitation procedures. The results indicated that the study provided evidence that, by altering specific behaviors, attitudinal changes can be effected even on a global self-concept measure.

Pine (1978) conducted a one year study of first graders to investigate and describe the relationships among classroom organization self-concept, and reading using pre and post-tests on self-concept and reading readiness and achievement, and categorizing the classrooms as either traditional (teacher-centered) or activity centered. The results of this study found that activity centered, informal education enhances the self-concept and produces reading achievement scores equal to or slightly higher

than those obtained by children in traditional classrooms.

Berg-Cross and Berg-Cross (1978) concluded in their study that merely listening to a story can result in some significant attitude changes in young children.

It appears that most of the related research used, separately supports the use of bibliotherapy and the development of the self-concept. Even though there are many isolated studies, there is a definite need for further research to incorporate the two areas.

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